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ABSTRACT

A study explored the relationship between gender and talk show viewing motives. Students (109) from 6 randomly selected introductory communication classes in a midwestern university, 30 people belonging to a non-traditional student organization called "Oasis," and 8 residents of a retirement home were given Rubin's instrument to assess their talk show viewing motives. Subjects were solicited with the assistance of the course instructors, the Oasis President, and the activities chairperson at the retirement home. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 92; they were given a questionnaire containing questions on demographic information including age, gender, weekly hours of daytime talk show viewing, employment, and videotaping habits. Results showed that people watch talk shows to be entertained, to pass time, and to relax. Results also indicated that women watch significantly more hours of talk shows each week than men do. Overall, this study's findings support previous television viewing research on gender. Results regarding differences in viewing motives between men and women suggest that both genders appear to have similar motives. The uses and gratifications perspective provided a broad framework with which to examine talk show viewing motives and the influence of gender on those motives. (Contains 5 tables of data, the survey instrument, and 56 references.) (NKA)

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Talk Show Viewing Motives: Does Gender Make a Difference?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between gender and talk show viewing motives. Talk show viewing motives were operationalized using Rubin's motive instrument. Students from six randomly selected introductory communication classes, members of a nontraditional student organization (OASIS), and residents of a retirement home were given Rubin's instrument to assess their talk show viewing motives. The results, listed in order of frequency of response, showed that the three primary viewing motives of talk shows were entertainment, to pass time, and relaxation. Quantitative analysis of the data revealed that women viewed talk shows significantly more each week than men, but the motives for viewing televised talk shows were not different between the genders.

Talk Show Viewing Motives: Does Gender Make a Difference?

Television is a central part of American life. Over the past four decades, television viewing and its effects have received a tremendous amount of attention in the field of mass communication. Most of the research has been devoted to the effects of violent television content on children. Mass communication studies which examine adult populations and their motives for watching specific types of programs are needed.

Americans devote a significant amount of time to watching television. The average television usage in United States households, for example, is six hours and fifty-six minutes per day (Wilson, 1994). This time spent viewing television is seen as an enjoyable activity. In a recent national survey, Americans report obtaining more pleasure from television than from sex, money, hobbies, food, religion, marriage, or sports (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. Xiii). It seems clear that television viewing is a popular activity.

Much of the research on television and human behavior focuses on children (Suedfeld, Little, Rank, Rank, & Ballard, 1986). It is important to remember, however, that adults spend a lot of time watching television as well. Available research regarding adults and television is incomplete. Published studies on television and adult populations focus primarily on politics (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1991; Peterson & Maiden, 1993; Somma, 1992; Tan, 1980) and on the fear of being victimized due to the amount of crime seen on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Perse, Ferguson, & McLeod, 1994). Very little research examines the impact of television on the thought processes, emotional reactions, attitudes, and personality characteristics of the general adult population (Suedfeld et al., 1986). Studying adult television viewing motives will not only fill a gap in existing research, but will also shed light on their uses for and gratifications sought from viewing television.

A specific genre of television viewing has been neglected as well. According to Davis and Walton (1984) "little has been written on the presentation of information within the format of

the television talk show" (Nelson & Robinson, 1994, p. 51). Livingstone and Lunt (1994) agree by noting that, "little research has examined the experiences of the home audience" (p. 43). This is surprising since Williams (1993) stated that there were 30 syndicated talk shows in the 1993-94 lineup, excluding morning and late night programs. In addition, in 1983, "Donahue" was watched by 5 million households per day (Carbaugh, 1989). Livingstone and Lunt (1994) report that "The Oprah Winfrey Show" is watched by an average of one and a half million viewers per day. With the large amount of programs and viewers and because talk shows are emerging as one of the most popular formats to produce in television (Peck, 1995), this topic is timely.

Understanding the talk show genre may also help us understand gratification of social needs which define interpersonal relationships. These social needs consist of pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, relaxation, and control (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988). Rubin (1993) argues that, "Research needs to delve more deeply into media content intended to provide a forum for interpersonal interaction, especially radio and television talk shows" (p. 101).

Another area warranting investigation is gender as it relates to television viewing motives. Men and women report differences in terms of the amount of television they view, and in the types of programs they choose to watch (Condry, 1989; Gantz & Wenner, 1991). These differences have not been addressed in the televised talk show setting. It is also noted that men have not been included in talk show viewing statistics. In fact, Tobenkin (1994) reports only the number of women who are watching talk shows. It is essential that men are included in this research as well. The inclusion of only one gender may lead to the exclusion of another set of motives which could greatly influence the conclusions drawn from this particular area of investigation.

Regardless of gender, people are tuning-in to talk shows. Donal Carbaugh (1989) argues that:

> One cannot find places in history where millions have gathered daily, to talk. But in contemporary America, we have such a place, where persons gather to talk, and to witness each other talk. We call it the talk show--a popular genre of television programming. If for no other reason than the sheer numbers of persons involved, it warrants serious study. (p. 2)

Based on Carbaugh's (1989) argument, explorations regarding the talk show setting deserve attention due to the nature of "talk" which exists on talk shows as well as the large amount of viewers reached by talk shows each day.

This study will focus on the influence gender has on talk show viewing motives. Since the understanding of the talk show genre is limited, this project is exploratory in nature. The practical nature of this study exists in its contribution to academic research in the field of mass communication. Social scientists argue that new forms of mass media must be, "studied for its own sake: the familiar must be defamiliarized through critical analysis before we can claim to understand it" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 2). While talk shows are not a mass medium per se, they do constitute a program type within the mass media and must also be "defamiliarized" before we can understand the potential effects, or lack of effects, they pose for society. In addition, attention to talk shows could also produce a deeper understanding of the potential talk shows have to influence interpersonal relationships.

Research in this area of mass communication is incomplete. Consequently, the greatest justification lies in the heuristic value it provides as a basis for future expeditions into the increasingly popular genre of the televised talk show. The following sections will address previous research regarding television viewing motives, the influence of gender on television viewing motives, and talk shows in general. In addition, the theoretical perspective guiding this study will be examined.

Television viewing motives research has been in existence for over two decades. Greenberg (1974) developed the first instrument to test children's reasons for watching television in Britain. Since that time, there have been numerous studies which have used viewing motives to gain an understanding of what reasons motivate people to use specific types of media. One individual often associated with viewing motives research is Alan Rubin. Since his first study in 1977, Rubin has conducted several studies in an attempt to uncover what motivates people to use different types of media.

In the past, television viewing was considered a routine, passive process. In recent years, however, researchers have come to realize that people watching television are active viewers (Livingstone, 1990). Blumler (1979) provides several meanings for "audience activity" by suggesting this phrase to encompass:

> (1) utility, or people's reasons or motivations for communicating; (2) intentionality, or the purposive or planned nature of communicating; (3) selectivity, or communication choice, which is based on prior interests and desires, and (4) imperviousness to influence, or Bauer's (1964) notion of the obstinate audience. (Rubin, 1993, p. 99)

Past studies regarding the active audience have identified several factors on which this activity is dependent, such as mobility and loneliness (Perse & Rubin, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1985). Others argue that media orientations, media attitudes, and both social and psychological factors influence activity (Rubin, 1993).

Some research suggests that there are differences between men and women regarding television viewing. Condry (1989) notes that, "more women watch [television] than men at every hour of the day and night" (p. 39). Moreover, men and women seem to watch for different reasons. Past studies suggest that men watch sports events and women watch soap operas (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988; Condry, 1989; Fowles, 1992). These studies argue that women interpret soap operas differently than men because the genre is geared toward women.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994) compare soap operas to talk shows by noting:

> Like the soap opera, it [the talk show] constructs the viewer as community member and repository of common sense, but takes issues beyond the private domain of the domestic and local, for the viewer is also constructed as citizen, with a duty to be informed about and act upon the wider world. (p. 39)

These "community members" are often women. While some comparisons can be made between soap operas and talk shows, researchers must, ". . . examine particular genres separately rather than assume commonalities between them" (Livingstone, Wober, & Lunt, 1994, p. 356).

According to Livingstone and Lunt (1994), there are almost twice as many female viewers of talk shows as there are male viewers. One potential reason for this is that, "The talk show, and the critical commentary which surrounds it, is gendered. . . the topics of talk shows are often 'women's issues'. . ." (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 42). As Oprah Winfrey states, "we do program these shows to empower women" (Squire, 1994). In addition to the content of the programs on talk shows, the types of talk on talk shows is another explanation for why women might watch more than men. According to Haag (1993) female friendships have unique characteristics which are seen on talk show programs. He explains that there are differences in terms of self-disclosure and interaction norms. He argues that, "Women in same-sex friendships tend to self-disclose more than the participants in mixed-sex or same-sex male relationships" (p. 117). Disclosures by guests on talk shows are seen as one-sided and immediately intimate (Priest & Dominick, 1994). In addition, the self-disclosures on talk shows often take the form of gossip. Masciarotte (1991) relates this form of disclosure on talk shows to women by noting, "In classical narrative terms, the show operates according to a most feminine activity, the tradition of gossip. . . "(p. 89). In terms of interaction norms, women enter the personal space of others more often than men and women also feel less restricted than men in terms of showing their emotions (Haag, 1993). This is not to suggest that women have more feelings than men, but

that women are more expressive about those feelings (Shields, 1987). Overall, men and women differ in terms of self-disclosure and interaction patterns. In addition, there are differences between the sexes regarding the expression of emotion. While these differences are important to consider when researching gender and television, much of the published studies on gender and television focus primarily on how the sexes are portrayed on television. Consequently, sex stereotyping and gender socialization are the central tenets of this body of research.

Statistics show that adults watch talk shows (Tobenkin, 1994). Carbaugh (1989) suggests that there are two types of talk show programs. The personality-centered talk shows focus on interviews with popular figures in order to inform us about his or her life. The issue-centered talk shows examine social issues through discussions and commentary. Several of the discussions on televised talk shows surround problematic situations or people who are out of the ordinary. Talk shows allow viewers to "explore the world of extraordinary persons, the sacred, the taboo while insulating ourselves from the potentially polluting taint of physical association with 'such persons'" (Nelson & Robinson, 1994, p. 52). Talk shows center on deviant behavior and allow their audiences to "let their minds travel where they cannot" (Bar-Haim, 1989, p. 23).

The roles that talk shows play in people's lives need further examination (Robinson, 1982). Fowles (1992) suggests that talk show messages belong to a category of programming called "maintenance." Maintenance programming involves being in between fantasy and reality programming. The author argues that talk shows introduce people with whom viewers can see themselves interacting with while providing Americans a form of escape. "Talk shows are chiefly an enhancement of the viewer's world..." (p. 58).

One reason television programs, such as talk shows, enhance viewers' lives involves the notion of public and private space. Haag (1993) argues that the placement of the television in the home allows private matters to become public. The distinction between public and private is

blurred, however, because people are viewing the private information (e.g. rape) on a public level (e.g. a talk show) in a private setting (e.g. the viewers' homes).

A final role that talk shows fulfill centers around the hosts of the shows. Writing about Oprah Winfrey, Haag (1993) states, "She is our mammy, our therapist, our cheerleader, our moral conscious, our role model, and our harshest critic when it is appropriate" (p. 120). Fowles (1992) suggests that talk show hosts invite viewers out of their situations in life. "The female viewer can link arms with her loveable hero, Phil Donahue, and go rocketing off into unexplored terrain, playing Lois Lane as Donahue charges into new ideas, practices, norms" (Fowles, 1992, p. 58). Talk show hosts allow their viewers to become a part of the persona that he or she portrays.

Talk shows and the roles they play in people's lives have the potential to have both positive and negative effects on society. Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1993) argue that, "Before we attempt to assess the positive and negative effects of the media on society, we must learn more about the uses people have for the media and how media use gratifies individual needs" (p. 406). This understanding is best obtained by examining the uses and gratifications perspective.

Uses and gratifications research began in the 1940s. Over five decades later, it is still being used to explain how people use the media. While this perspective receives its share of criticism, some communication scholars suggest that, "The analysis of how an audience member uses the media is best explained by uses and gratifications theory" (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1993, p. 405). Since the goal of this research project is to gain an understanding of how adult men and women use talk shows, and since uses and gratifications provides the best explanation for this phenomenon, it will be employed as the theoretical perspective to guide this study.

At the heart of uses and gratifications is the assumption that people actively seek out the mass media to gratify their individual needs. Gantz and Wenner (1995) argue, "This perspective

conceives of the audience as active, with its selection of media and specific programming as goal oriented" (p. 61). People watch television for various reasons and have different goals for viewing. Another assumption of uses and gratifications is that people use the media to satisfy their expectations. For example, people may watch "The Oprah Winfrey Show" to learn about other people and to escape from the pressures of the day. Uses and gratifications also states that people are aware of and are able to report their own motives for using mass communication. This assumption prompts a lot of the criticism regarding this perspective. Infante, Rancer & Womack (1992) state, "some critics believe that individuals cannot respond accurately to questions about their own feelings and behavior" (p. 412). A final assumption of this perspective is that motives need to be understood before the cultural significance of the media is addressed (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rubin & Rubin, 1985). In other words, before people try to explain the effects talk shows have on society, there needs to be an understanding of why society is watching them. In short, uses and gratifications research is concerned with what people expect to gain from viewing, and to what uses they put the results of their attention to television.

Published research on televised talk shows has overlooked both the adult population and the specific function of gender as they relate to television viewing motives. Based on the literature, it is obvious that television is a central part of American life. The televised talk show is quickly emerging as an important genre of television which warrants critical examination.

After examining the existing literature on television viewing motives and the influence of gender on those motives, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: Why do people watch talk shows?

RQ2: Are there gender differences for viewing talk shows?

Method

This section outlines the quantitative methods which were used to gather data and to address the research questions in this study.

Subjects

Respondents were 109 students enrolled in six randomly selected introductory communication courses at a Midwest university, 30 people belonging to a non-traditional student organization called "Oasis" at a Midwest university, and 8 people who reside at a retirement home. The random selection of introductory communication courses was conducted by assigning each of the 63 available sections a number and then drawing six of those sections to participate. Subjects were solicited with the assistance of the instructors in the courses, the Oasis President, and the activities chairperson at the retirement home; participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

Instrument

A packet including an informed consent form which explained the study and contained five questions which related to demographic information and a questionnaire (Appendix A) was given to the students during their regularly scheduled classes, to the Oasis members through a monthly mailing, and to the retirement home occupants during a regularly scheduled residence association meeting. The questionnaire contained questions on demographic information including age, gender, weekly hours of daytime talk show viewing, employment, and videotaping habits. In addition, there was one scale which is described below.

The Television Viewing Motives Instrument (Rubin, 1983) was used to survey subjects' talk show viewing behaviors due to its theoretical basis in uses and gratifications research. This self-report instrument was originally designed by B.S. Greenberg to assess why British children use television.

Rubin's modification of Greenberg's scale was selected due to its adaptability to different contexts, because of its reliability and validity, and because it is easy to complete as well as easy to score. The motives scales have been adapted and used in several studies ranging from television news (Rubin, 1981; Rubin & Perse, 1987b) to soap opera viewing (Rubin & Perse, 1987a). Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher (1994) noted that, "Greenberg's scale and Rubin's adaptation are the most widely used measures of viewing motivation" (p. 371).

This self-report instrument was recommended for use in a source book entitled Communication Research Measures which identifies past research using this scale (Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher, 1994). The motive dimensions of this scale are reliable. Rubin (1979) reports acceptable cronbach alphas ranging from .62 (Relaxation) to .81 (learning), and Rubin and Perse (1987b) report alphas ranging from .71 (Social Utility) to .87 (Entertainment). Rubin (1981) supports construct validity of the scale by finding a .93 Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance. The results of other studies also provide concurrent and criterion-related validity for the motive dimensions (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1983; Rubin & Perse, 1987a; Finn & Gore, 1988).

For this study, the instrument was renamed "Talk Show Viewing Motives Instrument" and was used to explore the reasons why people watch daytime televised talk shows. Subjects were asked to report how much each reason given on the instrument was like their own reasons for watching daytime televised talk shows. The 27 viewing motive statements were divided into nine factors: relaxation, companionship, habit, pass time, entertainment, social interaction, information, arousal, and escape. Each factor corresponded to three viewing motive statements. Scoring was on a five-point Likert-type scale where the numbers indicated how much the reasons given were like the subjects' reasons for viewing talk shows. Respondents could reply "Exactly" (coded 5), "A Lot" (coded 4), "Somewhat" (coded 3), "Not Much" (coded 2), or "Not At All" (coded 1).

There were five demographic variables included in the study: gender, age, weekly hours of talk show viewing, employment, and videotaping habits. Gender was coded 1 for male and 2 for female; employment was coded 1 for full-time and 2 for part-time; and videotaping was coded 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no" referring to whether or not the subjects videotaped televised talk shows for later viewing.

Data Analysis

Two, two-tailed t-tests were used to examine the weekly hours of talk show viewing of men and women and the differences in talk show viewing motives between men and women. The probability level was set at $p \leq .05$.

The results derived from the quantitative research design of the present study are discussed in the following section.

Results

The data presented in this section reports descriptive statistics concerning the demographic variables used in this study. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 92 ($\bar{x} = 27$). As table one indicates, more women (63%) than men (37%) participated in the study. The mean weekly hours of viewing for women was 3.20 ($N = 93$) and 1.98 for men ($N = 54$). There were more subjects who did not work outside of the home during the day (55%) than subjects who did work outside of the home during the day (45%). Of the subjects who did work, there were more who worked part-time (32%) than full-time (10%). There were more subjects who did not video tape talk shows to view at a later date (92%) than subjects who did video tape talk shows (8%).

Acceptable Cronbach's alphas were found for eight of the nine viewing motives: relaxation (Cronbach's alpha = .87), companionship (Cronbach's alpha = .85), arousal (Cronbach's alpha = .84), entertainment (Cronbach's alpha = .82), information (Cronbach's alpha = .81), escape (Cronbach alpha's = .71), pass time (Cronbach's alpha = .70), and social interaction (Cronbach's alpha = .68). These measures of reliability are consistent with other uses

of the measure. The reliability for viewing out of habit was not acceptable (Cronbach's alpha =.30) and was deleted from any further analysis. The twenty-seven item viewing motives scale produced an acceptable overall Cronbach's alpha of .91.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: Why do people watch talk shows? Subjects' responses to research question one were solicited through 27 motive statements on the Talk Show Viewing Motives Instrument. Responses to survey items were arrayed on a five-point Likert-type scale with "5" indicating that the viewing motive statement identified on the survey was exactly like the respondent's reason for viewing to "1" which indicated that the viewing motive statement on the survey was not at all like the respondents reason for watching talk shows. As table two indicates, the means for each of the motive statements ranged from 1.52 ("So I won't have to be alone") to 3.64 ("Because it entertains me"). Motive scores were calculated for each of the eight viewing motives by the addition of the responses to the three corresponding statements for each motive and then dividing that number by the number of responses. As table three indicates, the motive scores ranged from 5.16 (companionship) to 10.25 (entertainment). The three strongest viewing motives were: entertainment ($\bar{x}$ = 10.25; SD = 3.05); pass time ($\bar{x}$ = 10.05; SD = 2.70); and relaxation ($\bar{x}$ = 7.18; SD = 3.09). In general, people report that they watch talk shows the most in order to be entertained, to pass the time away, and for relaxation.

Research Question 2

Two t-tests were used to answer research question two: Are there gender differences for viewing talk shows? Differences in weekly hours of viewing between men and women were assessed by a two-tailed, independent samples t-test. Women had a mean of 3.20 hours (N = 93; SD = 4.49) and men had a mean of 1.98 hours (N = 54; SD = 2.86). As table four

indicates, t-test results were significant (t = -2.02; df = 144; $p \leq .05$). Women watch significantly more hours of talk shows each week than men.

Gender differences in televised talk show viewing motives were assessed by a two-tailed, independent samples t-test. The means were calculated for each of the nine viewing motives: relaxation (men, $\bar{x}$ = 6.73; n = 33; SD = 3.15; women, $\bar{x}$ = 7.40; n = 67; SD = 3.06); companionship (men, $\bar{x}$ = 4.82; n = 33; SD = 2.63; women, $\bar{x}$ = 5.35; n = 67; SD = 2.82); habit (men, $\bar{x}$ = 8.50; n = 33; SD = 2.33; women, $\bar{x}$ = 9.19; n = 67; SD = 2.43); pass time (men, $\bar{x}$ = 9.52; n = 33; SD = 2.86; women, $\bar{x}$ = 10.31; n = 67; SD = 2.60); entertainment (men, $\bar{x}$ = 10.03; n = 33; SD = 3.20; women, $\bar{x}$ = 10.36; n = 67; SD = 2.99); social interaction (men, $\bar{x}$ = 6.12; n = 33; SD = 2.63; women, $\bar{x}$ = 5.99; n = 67; SD = 2.65); information (men, $\bar{x}$ = 6.15; n = 33; SD = 2.56; women, $\bar{x}$ = 5.67; n = 67; SD = 2.91); arousal (men, $\bar{x}$ = 7.48; n = 33; SD = 3.32; women, $\bar{x}$ = 6.75; n = 67; SD = 3.04); escape (men, $\bar{x}$ = 7.15; n = 33; SD = 2.90; women, $\bar{x}$ = 6.96; n = 67; SD = 3.09). As table five indicates, none of the t-test results were significant; men and women seem to have similar motives for viewing talk shows.

Discussion/Summary

The results regarding why people watch talk shows indicate that entertainment, to pass time, and relaxation are the three primary viewing motives. Escape, arousal, social interaction, information, and companionship were less dominant reasons for viewing. The entertainment motive was comprised of the following statements: (1) "because it entertains me"; (2) "because it's enjoyable"; and (3) "because it amuses me." It would seem that this motivation for watching talk shows could be related to the notion that television, and talk shows on television, are used for entertainment purposes. If the function of the talk show genre is to entertain people, then it appears as if that function is being served.

The second primary motive, to pass time, was comprised of the following statements: (1) "when I have nothing better to do"; (2) "because it passes time away, particularly when I'm

bored"; and (3) "because it gives me something to do to occupy my time." All three of the statements which measured the pass time motive seem to suggest that watching talk shows is done when there is nothing else to do or when people are bored. Since pass time was found to be a primary viewing motive, it appears that people in this study chose to watch talk shows for the specific use of filling up idle time.

The third primary motive for watching talk shows, relaxation, was made up of the following statements: (1) "because it relaxes me"; (2) because it allows me to unwind"; and (3) "because it's a pleasant rest." The need for relaxation is an important one which seems to be met through the viewing of talk shows. Talk show viewing allows people to relax by providing them with a program into which they do not have to put a lot of mental energy. Unlike serial programs, such as soap operas, there are not specific characters and story lines which must be followed so that the viewer can understand the next episode. Consequently, talk show viewers can relax while watching the programs without the fear of missing an important scene or bit of information. While these results show why people in general watch talk shows, they do not address the influence of gender on people's viewing habits and motivations; this issue is explored in the second research question.

The results surrounding the second research question regarding gender differences for talk show viewing indicate that women watch significantly more hours of talk shows each week than men. This finding is consistent with Condry's (1989) argument that women watch more television generally than men. In addition, it also provides support to Livingstone and Lunt's (1994) conclusion that there are twice as many female viewers of talk shows than there are male viewers. An explanation for this gender difference may have to do with the content of the talk shows. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) argue that the talk show genre is gendered. Moreover, Oprah Winfrey stated that she designs her programs to empower women (Squire, 1991). In addition, in press conferences and interviews, Winfrey states that emotions and feelings are

what she is all about (Haag, 1993). Talk shows typically address relational issues (New Yorker, 1992), which are interpreted as pertaining more to women, who are often seen as more emotional than men (Shields, 1987). Consequently, the genre lends itself to be viewed by more women than men. In addition to addressing relational issues, the forms which "talk" takes on the talk shows also provides an explanation for the gender differences in the amount of viewing. Haag (1993) suggests that women's attention to talk shows has to do with some unique characteristics regarding "women's talk." Talk shows often consist of self-disclosures by the guests. Haag (1993) relates self-disclosure on talk shows to women by noting:

> Use of self-disclosure tends to facilitate communication and intimacy, and gives a greater sense of being in a relationship. . . self-disclosure topics for women typically include personal and family matters and are more emotionally oriented and intimate. . . men tend to focus their talk on activities. (p. 118)

This gender difference regarding a prominent type of talk on talk shows, self-disclosures about relational issues, provides additional support for why women report watching more talk shows each week than men. Overall, the present study's finding that women watch more hours of talk shows each week than men supports previous television viewing research. In addition, an explanation for this difference suggests that if women are the target audience for the talk show genre, then they will be more inclined to view the shows as compared to men.

The results regarding differences in talk show viewing motives between men and women suggest that both genders appear to have similar motives for viewing televised talk shows. This finding is inconsistent with past research which suggests that men and women have different motives for viewing television. One reason for this difference may rest with content. While past research on television viewing motive differences between men and women focused on the content of the programs (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988; Condry, 1989; Fowles, 1992), the present study did not address the issue of content as it relates to talk shows.

The connotative definitions of the specific motives could also play a part in the lack of gender differences found for talk show viewing motives. What is "relaxing" and "entertaining" to women, for example, could be very different from what men would label as "relaxing" and "entertaining." Consequently, when men and women fill out surveys regarding the general talk show genre, the statements used to measure the motives could be evoking very different connotations of the types of talk shows being viewed. While it appears that men and women watch talk shows for the same reasons, it is not clear if both genders are identifying the survey statements with similar or different types of talk show programs. A further explanation exists in the possibility that within the entire population of adult male viewers of television, there could be a minority subpopulation who uses talk shows in the same ways that women do. In this subpopulation, for example, there could be men who are interested in self-disclosures regarding personal issues which are typically viewed as pertaining to women. Consequently, these men and women would be watching the same types of talk shows for the same reasons. It is not clear, however, if men and women are tuning into the same types of talk show programs or if they are watching different types of programs for similar reasons.

Theoretical interpretations

The uses and gratifications perspective provided the researchers with a broad framework from which to examine talk show viewing motives and the influence of gender on those motives. This perspective was useful because it explained audience activity and provided an understanding of what motivates people to use the media in specific ways.

The central tenet of the uses and gratifications perspective is that audience members are active participants who are goal oriented in terms of their media uses (Baran & Davis, 1995). How people use the media, and specifically how they use the talk show genre, is the focus of the present study.

People watch talk shows for a variety of reasons. Some people report that they watch talk shows for entertainment while others claim that they watch the programs in order to pass time or for relaxation. These results support the notion of an active audience. An active audience consists of people who actively seek specific gratifications from their attention to media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). It seems as if people have specific needs which are gratified through the viewing of televised talk shows. These needs encompass more than what is simply reported by the viewers.

The relationship between media and their audiences is influenced by several factors. For example, social and psychological factors influence viewing motives (Rubin, 1993). Talk show viewing motives are linked to the uses and gratifications perspective in that the choice to watch talk shows rests with each audience member. No one forces people to watch televised talk shows; this choice is made by each viewer. Consequently, the same content could have very different effects on different people.

A final assumption of the uses and gratifications perspective is that audience members are aware of and can report their own uses for specific media content (Baran & Davis, 1995). While this remains a debated issue, it can be argued that people are becoming more aware of their uses for media content due to the increase in options. With that choice comes more consciousness about what people are choosing and why. Since there are currently over 15 daytime televised talk shows with varying content, and since some of those shows air simultaneously, viewers have the choice of what type of show they want to watch. By making that choice, audience members become more aware of the types of talk shows they are watching.

By addressing the issue of viewing motives, the uses and gratifications perspective provided the best theoretical framework for the present study. In addition, it allowed the

researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the factors which influence audience activity and the ways in which those factors assist in the negotiation of viewing choices.

Future Research

This study was viewed as an exploratory step toward the inclusion of talk shows in television research. Further examination is needed to discover what factors motivate men and women to view talk shows. One area for potential consideration is television viewing styles. Hawkins, Reynolds, and Pingree (1991) have suggested that television viewing styles indicate different ways of being active viewers. It would seem that the integration of these behaviors in terms of talk show viewing with regard to gender could produce insights of a highly significant nature.

An examination of adults in various age groups could also aid in the understanding of televised talk show viewing motives. Baran and Davis (1995) argue that television is, "the only medium in history in which people can interact at the earliest and latest years of life, not to mention all those years in between" (p. 304). It would be interesting to investigate whether or not there's a correlation between age and talk show viewing to assess the primary motivations people report from the early to the late stages of their adult lives.

The inclusion of research regarding other programs similar to the talk show genre would add to this body of research as well. Examining the use of the "Home Shopping Club," (HSC), for example, could provide insight into how people are using the programs in terms of their interpersonal relationships. Cerulo, Ruane, and Chayko (1992) argue that the HSC is similar to talk shows by noting that, "viewers sometimes develop not only a club identity but a special allegiance to certain hosts, further fine-tuning their group affiliation" (p. 115). This connection between the HSC and talk shows as they deal with interpersonal communication issues such as identity and relationships needs further exploration.

A final area of consideration for future research is in the area of reality construction. While this study focused on quantitative analysis, there was an open-ended question at the end of the survey which stated, "In what ways, if any, do you make use of televised talk shows in your daily life?" More than half of the subjects responded with answers regarding the use of talk shows as topics of conversations and as ways to initiate conversations. This inclusion of talk shows into their daily lives suggests that people don't simply view talk shows and then forget what they see on the programs. Instead, subjects are incorporating what they see on talk shows into their lives. Future research needs to examine this use and other potential uses to which people are putting talk show information.

Conclusion

Talk shows have the potential to disperse vast amounts of knowledge to a wide range of people. With the increasing number of syndicated talk shows, the genre merits critical examination. As seen from the results of this study, people report that they watch talk shows to be entertained, to pass time, and for relaxation. Women watch more talk shows each week than men. This difference could be attributed to the content of the talk show programs. If talk shows are geared toward women, then that population may choose to view the programs more often than men.

Due to the massive population talk shows reach each day, studying the programs is important. With the increase in the number of televised talk shows and the controversy which currently surrounds them, there seems to be a foundation set up for future effects research. Continued exploration of talk shows and other genres which have similar characteristics is crucial to the understanding of why people choose to watch the programs and how those choices influence the constructions of their realities and their interpersonal communication behaviors.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Breakdown of Subjects

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
"Women"	93	63.0
"Men"	54	37.0
Work		
"Yes"	65	44.5
"No"	81	55.5
"Full-time"	15	10.3
"Part-time"	47	32.2
Video-taping		
"Yes"	10	6.8
"No"	136	93.2

TABLE 2

Breakdown of Questionnaire Responses*

Motive Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD
Item		
01. Because it relaxes me	2.33	1.13
02. So I won't have to be alone	1.52	.88
03. Just because it's there	3.38	1.17
04. When I have nothing better to do	3.58	1.16
05. Because it entertains me	3.64	1.17
06. Because it's something to do when friends come over	2.00	1.19
07. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others	2.14	1.12
08. Because it's thrilling	2.43	1.30
09. So I can forget about school, work, or other things	2.79	1.41
10. Because it allows me to unwind	2.68	1.17
11. When there's no one else to talk to or be with	1.99	1.20
12. Because I just like to watch	3.31	1.32
13. Because it passes time away, particularly when I'm bored	3.50	1.05
14. Because it's enjoyable	3.09	1.12
15. So I can talk with other people about what's on	2.34	1.18
16. So I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before	1.97	1.10
17. Because it's exciting	2.72	1.24
18. So I can get away from the rest of the family or others	1.74	1.13
19. Because it's a pleasant rest	2.22	1.16
20. Because it makes me feel less lonely	1.65	1.03
21. Because it's a habit, just something I do	2.34	1.24
22. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time	3.02	1.17
23. Because it amuses me	3.56	1.25
24. So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching	1.80	1.04
25. So I could learn about what could happen to me	1.75	1.05
26. Because it peps me up	1.96	1.10
27. So I can get away from what I'm doing	2.55	1.23

*n = 103

TABLE 3

Talk Show Viewing Motives Scores

Motive	$\bar{x}$	SD
Relaxation	7.18	3.09
Companionship	5.16	2.76
Pass Time	10.05	2.70
Entertainment	10.25	3.05
Social Interaction	6.03	2.63
Information	5.83	2.79
Arousal	6.99	3.14
Escape	7.02	3.02

TABLE 4

Differences in Amount of Weekly Talk Show Viewing Between Men and Women

Hours	Men		Women		t
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
	1.98	2.87	3.20	4.49	-2.02*

*$p \leq .05$

TABLE 5

Talk Show Viewing Motive Differences Between Men and Women

Motive	Men $\bar{x}$	SD	Women $\bar{x}$	SD	t
Relaxation	6.72	3.15	7.47	3.03	-1.13
Companionship	4.81	2.63	5.36	2.83	-.93
Pass Time	9.51	2.86	10.36	2.59	-1.48
Entertainment	10.03	3.20	10.35	3.02	-.49
Social Interaction	6.12	2.63	6.03	2.65	.16
Information	6.15	2.55	5.71	2.91	.74
Arousal	7.49	3.32	6.80	3.03	1.02
Escape	7.15	2.90	7.02	3.08	.21

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Dear _____:

My name is Stacy Cress and I am conducting a research project in the Department of Communications at Southwest Missouri State University. I am interested in the daytime talk show viewing habits of adult men and women. There are three sections of this mailing: an information sheet, a questionnaire, and an open-ended question. Completing the three sections will take you approximately five to ten minutes. The information you provide will be kept confidential. DO NOT put your name on the survey. Participation is voluntary, and consent is indicated by completion of the survey instruments. You may refuse to answer any of the questions. I have already paid for the return postage on the survey packet. After you complete the questionnaire, all you need to do is refold it, tape the open side shut, and place it in the mail at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions or need to contact me for any reason, you may reach me at (417) 836-5218 and I will be happy to return your call. I can be contacted by mail at Southwest Missouri State University, Department of Communications, 901 S. National, Springfield, MO. 65804.

Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your assistance with this project is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Stacy Cress

For this study, "talk show" includes daytime, issue-centered programs which primarily focus on social issues through commentary (e.g. The Oprah Winfrey Show, Donahue, Ricki Lake, Maury Povich, etc.). Please exclude personality-centered talk shows (e.g. David Letterman, Jay Leno, Jon Stewart, Larry King, etc.) when responding to the questions in this study.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. On average, how many hours per week, to the nearest half-hour, do you watch talk shows? _____

2. What is your age? _____

3. What sex are you? (please circle) Male Female

4. Do you work outside of your home during the day? (please circle) Yes No

   If so, full or part-time? (please circle) Full Part-time

5. Do you videotape talk shows for later viewing? (please circle) Yes No

✔ IF YOU ANSWERED "0" TO QUESTION #1,
PLEASE TURN TO PAGE FOUR AND ANSWER QUESTION #1

✔✔ IF YOU ANSWERED 30 MINUTES OR MORE TO QUESTION #1,
PLEASE TURN TO PAGE TWO AND COMPLETE THE TALK SHOW VIEWING MOTIVES INSTRUMENT

Talk Show Viewing Motives Instrument

Instructions: Here are some reasons that other people have given for watching talk shows. Please circle the number to indicate how much each reason is like your own reason for watching talk shows.

5 = Exactly
4 = A Lot
3 = Somewhat
2 = Not Much
1 = Not At All

I watch talk shows . . . .

01. Because it relaxes me	5	4	3	2	1
02. So I won't have to be alone	5	4	3	2	1
03. Just because it's there	5	4	3	2	1
04. When I have nothing better to	5	4	3	2	1
05. Because it entertains me	5	4	3	2	1
06. Because it's something to do when friends come over	5	4	3	2	1
07. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others	5	4	3	2	1
08. Because it's thrilling	5	4	3	2	1
09. So I can forget about school, work, or other things	5	4	3	2	1
10. Because it allows me to unwind	5	4	3	2	1
11. When there's no one else to talk to or be with	5	4	3	2	1
12. Because I just like to watch	5	4	3	2	1

PLEASE GO TO PAGE THREE AND COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

5 = Exactly
4 = A Lot
3 = Somewhat
2 = Not Much
1 = Not At All

13. Because it passes time away, particularly when I'm bored	5	4	3	2	1
14. Because it's enjoyable	5	4	3	2	1
15. So I can talk with other people about what's on	5	4	3	2	1
16. So I can learn how to do things I haven't done before	5	4	3	2	1
17. Because it's exciting	5	4	3	2	1
18. So I can get away from the rest of the family or others	5	4	3	2	1
19. Because it's a pleasant rest	5	4	3	2	1
20. Because it makes me feel less lonely	5	4	3	2	1
21. Because it's a habit, just something I do	5	4	3	2	1
22. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time	5	4	3	2	1
23. Because it amuses me	5	4	3	2	1
24. So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching	5	4	3	2	1
25. So I could learn about what could happen to me	5	4	3	2	1
26. Because it peps me up	5	4	3	2	1
27. So I can get away from what I'm doing	5	4	3	2	1

PLEASE GO TO PAGE FOUR AND ANSWER QUESTION #2

1. What are the reasons why you do not watch televised talk shows?

2. In what ways, if any, do you make use of televised talk shows in your daily life?